

LIFE AFTER PERFINS

By Jack Peach

That famous letter of 13th March 1868 conveying to Mr. Sloper the Postmaster General's permission for stamps to be perforated with names and initials ends "...with a view to protect merchants and others, as far as possible, from the theft of stamps used by them".'

The first patent in the UK for 'Apparatus for Impressing and Registering Fiscal Stamps to Supercede Adhesive Stamps' (1884) has the claim, among others, that "the loss and robbery of stamps becomes absolutely impossible". That patent was for what are now known as meter franking machines. However, in spite of their many advantages it was not until 1922 that the British Post Office allowed their use.

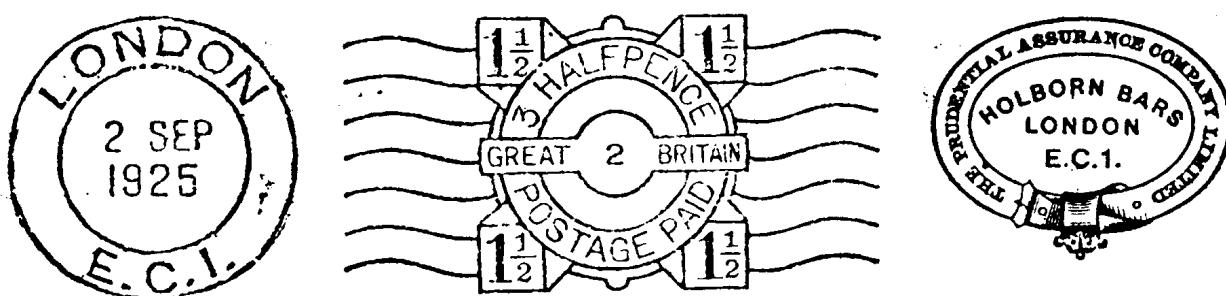
During the period between 1868 and 1922 the perforating of stamps with firms initials held unquestioned supremacy as the means for preventing theft of postage stamps. Since 1922 the position has changed; first gradually then with ever growing rapidity after the last war. The meter franking machine offers much more than increased security and today most firms would place the reduced labour costs in the post room together with the advertising advantages of a slogan as prime reasons for changing to meter franking.

Many firms who used to perforate their stamps now use these machines and a fruitful area for perfin collectors is to try to match the perfin with corresponding meter mark.

What about the first perfin - arguably SC of Copestake, Moore, Crampton) & Co - would the mark shown in Fig. 1 be such a match? The meter frank slogan tells us that Copestakes goes back to 1826 and Nottingham is also a town which might have had an association with 'Drapers' Warehousemen¹ (Bulletin 234; 257 & 258).



The second licence to be granted for the use of a meter franking machine was to the Prudential Assurance Company. Licence No 1 was issued to the firm selling the machines so Licence No 2 becomes the first issued to a normal user. Most perfin collectors must have an example of a 'Pru' perfin. Their meter franks are not exactly scarce either; the earliest type is illustrated and the identity is on the envelope flap. The machine number is the small figure 2 in the centre of the frank. And so we could go on –



Concluding one might say that the philatelic collector of perfins is on the same playing field as a collector of Newfoundland stamps there's not much new coming out! But new meter franks are born daily - so you see there IS life after Perfins.